ESSENTIAL SKILLS FOR ACADEMIC PAPERS

Modern Languages Association (MLA) Edition

MLA
FIRST, WHY MLA MATTERS...

- I'm going to devote a few slides to the question of why MLA formatting and citation rules matter because these may seem less important than the ideas contained in papers. Later, we'll discuss essay conventions. I want to establish that all are critically important. Let's begin with some initial thoughts as to why MLA matters.

  - Your care and craft in all aspects of your academic papers help to establish your credibility.

    - As readers enter the "world" of anything they read, they assess whether or not the author can be trusted. Your commitment to accuracy at the formatting and citation levels establishes how much you care about accuracy.

    - If your formatting and citation are inaccurate, it's much more likely your statements are, too because care and accuracy are habits of mind that influence the quality of everything we do.

    - I have been in enough grading meetings to know that many professors discount papers with a glance or two because they are inaccurately formatted and/or are grammatically and mechanically incorrect. No one produces perfect work, but the more we get right, the more favorable impression we will make, the more we will be trusted, and the more our professors can relax with our work and focus on what we get right.

  - Attention (or lack of attention) to formatting, citation, and other paper conventions can make our academic life smoother and more fulfilling, or less smooth and less fulfilling. These practices become a passport. They're a ticket to academic life.

WHY MLA MATTERS

The way we format information provides one layer of *meaning* in academic papers.

- A paper's formatting conveys necessary information and meaning through commonly understood and easily recognizable visual cues. It answers readers' questions and creates a familiar path for them to navigate.

  It is therefore a component of the respectful exchange between writer and reader because it makes the reader's experience better.

- It is a requirement of sound scholarship and so it is required for this course.

  To set us up for success, remember that our formatting isn't arbitrary, something to do as time permits, or something to save for our final submissions. It is a necessary component of all submitted essays.

- And with practice, it gets much, much easier.

  This is why it's important to reach for the materials you need to format correctly every time. This will accustom your eye to correct formatting and reinforce strong skills.

FORMATTING MATTERS

- Why? Imagine if every time you turned on your computer, it was formatted and organized differently. One day you'd see icons, the next day you'd just see a text bar, and the next day you'd discover that you need to press "/" while singing a tune to open your email.

- Again and again, you'd be in unfamiliar territory, and your experience would be one of frustration.

- Although many of us love our computers and phones, they are NOT our focus when we're using them. They are merely tools to help us get to what we're interested in. We want them to be quiet extensions of our hands and minds that allow us to quickly open doors to information.

- Correct, conventional paper formatting functions in the same way. It allows information to flow. It allows the reader to focus on our content. It eliminates barriers to information.

- When formatting is incorrect, it is a source of frustration. It conveys information inaccurately and in ways that are unfamiliar to the eye. It makes readers focus on **it** rather than what's important. It raises unanswered questions.
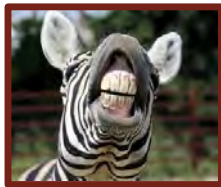
As my dentist says:

"When we become aware of our

teeth, we know we have a problem."

- Make your papers soooo clean, your audience can read them pain-free.

FORMATTING MATTERS

Just one more analogy to get us to the next step…

- What if in June, green meant GO, and in August green meant STOP?
- If stop signs changed color and shape every few weeks?
- If streets had new signs with new names every couple of months?
- We would be confused and frustrated. We might ask,

"Can't this just be consistent?"

- Exactly! That's what our readers want. They want to rapidly understand what we mean by the information we're conveying without frustration. They want to enter a familiar landscape when our papers comes before them.

So, make a resolution, here and now.

This PowerPoint presents ESSENTIAL SKILLS you must take responsibility for. I hope I've convinced you that they're important. It's okay to practice and make mistakes. It's okay to ask questions. It's not okay to ignore them and hope for the best.

Next stop, acceptable file formats for submitting essays…

THE MLA PAPER: DOCUMENT FILE TYPES

Use Microsoft Word if Possible

- You must use a word processing program that 1) you can format as demonstrated; 2) you can upload to Canvas; and 3) that VeriCite, Canvas's plagiarism detection software, can process. Acceptable document file types are -

  - Microsoft Word (Available for PC and Mac)
  - PDF
  - Pages (Apple)
  - Google Docs (although these can be problematic)

  Some file formats can't be formatted as this PowerPoint demonstrates, aren't accepted by Canvas, or can't be opened on my PC or Mac.

  If you're using another file type, most can be converted to PDF by saving your document, selecting PRINT, and then choosing "Save as PDF" under the printer option drop-down.

  However, I can help you more effectively if you're using Microsoft Word and submit it as a Word document and not a PDF. Canvas allows me to make in-text comments in Word. So, please obtain Word if at all possible. I believe you can get a free or low-cost subscription to Office 365 with a student (.edu) email address.

Up next, formatting the content of your documents in MLA format…

THE MLA PAPER: DOCUMENT FORMATTING

To save you time, create an MLA-formatted "template" for the papers you'll write in this course. Once you've created the template, save it. Then simply open the template and save it under a new name for each essay. Here is how to format it:

1. Set all margins to 1''.

2. Double-click at the very top of the page in the document header. Once it opens, right-justify the header text (align it with the right margin). Type your last name, a space, and then go to the"Insert" tab and click "Page Number." Make sure the page number appears in the upper right hand corner of the header following a space and your last name. This header will now be located on each page, and page numbers will automatically advance.

3. Double-click in the body of the document (to get out of the header).

4. Highlight the whole body of the page and left-justify this area so that text will "cling" to the left margin and will be straight up and down. Text along the right margin will be jagged or uneven.

5. Set all body text to double spacing.

6. Starting on the top line (which has been left-justified) create the four-line, double-spaced heading as shown on the next slide. Carefully copy exact formatting and provide the same information. Do NOT place this "heading" information in the "header" with your last name and the page number. The four-line heading should NOT repeat on every page.

7. After completing the last line of the heading, hit ENTER and type "Title" as a place-holder for the titles of your essays. Center justify the word "Title." Hit ENTER and make sure the body of the paper is left justified (not centered like the title).

8. Highlight the remainder of the body of the page (starting under the title). Set the tabs in the ruler so that the first line of each paragraph is indented ½ "

9. MS-Word currently defaults to inserting an extra line between paragraphs. REMOVE THIS by 1) highlighting the body of the page, 2) clicking on the Line Spacing button, selecting "Line Spacing Options," and 3) clicking the box labled "Don't add space between paragraphs of the same style."

You will find a sample MLA paper in the Canvas module labeled "Course Materials." Refer to this sample throughout the course. It provides additional helpful information.

THE MLA PAPER: DOCUMENT FORMATTING

This is an image from the "Sample MLA Paper" available in "Course Materials." It shows correctly located "header" information (last name and page number which should repeat on each page) and "heading" format (four lines which should only appear on the first page and include your full name, my name, the course title, and due date, written in the Day Month Year format).

Again, the full sample document contains lots of other useful information.

THE MLA PAPER: WORKS CITED PAGE

The Works Cited page begins on a new page. Center the title "Works Cited" without underlining, bolding, or italicizing it. If there is only one entry, title this page "Work Cited."

The Works Cited page is a list of all the sources cited in your paper.

Angeli 10

Works Cited

Allen, R.L. *The American Farm Book; or Compend of American Agriculture; Being a Practical Treatise on Soils, Manures, Draining, Irrigation, Grasses, Grain, Roots, Fruits, Cotton, Tobacco, Sugar Cane, Rice, and Every Staple Product of the United States with the Best Methods of Planting, Cultivating, and Preparation for Market.* Saxton, 1849.

Baker, Gladys L., *et al. Century of Service: The First 100 Years of the United States*

MLA now requires only the publisher, and not the city of publication. The 8th edition also does not require sources to have a publication marker, (such as "Print").

Some essay submissions will require a Works Cited page. Here's how to format it:

- The Works Cited page begins on its own page at the end of the a paper.
- Begin by typing "Works Cited" (not "Bibliography," or "Sources," or anything else) at the top of the last page, centering the words "Works Cited."
- The entire paper is double-spaced, and this includes the Works Cited entries. Don't add additional lines before or after the title, "Works Cited." The entire page should be double-spaced.
- Hit "return" to begin formatting the body of the page where the entries will appear.
- For the entries, indentation is the OPPOSITE of paragraph indentation. The top arrow (in the ruler tool) should be placed at the left margin. The bottom arrow should be placed ½ " in from that.
  - Works Cited entries look like wheelbarrows with the top line forming the "handle." Lines underneath the first are indented ½ " inch for each entry.
- Entries will be arranged alphabetically.

THE MLA PAPER: DOCUMENT FORMATTING

Paper Formatting Resources

Overall, the paper formatting isn't too hard. I encourage you to set it up once by carefully following these steps. Then, you will have mastered one important lesson. Again, this is a requirement for essay submissions.

If you have questions, though, no problem. Let's get them answered before assignments are due.

I recommend you search Google for more step-by-step instructions on how to add page numbers to headers, setting margins, or correcting line spacing issues between paragraphs, for example. If you ask me the question, I will likely do a Google search, myself and direct you to that link.

If you don't find what you need or continue to have trouble, just let me know.

Now that we've covered paper formatting, let's move on to MLA citations and citation formatting…

THE MLA PAPER: SOURCE CITATIONS

What are citations?

Why do we use them?

- When we quote OR summarize OR paraphrase the ideas of others, we must cite them. This means we must let our readers know where we got the idea from. This is the cardinal rule of scholarship.

- We cite for the following reasons:

    - To help other scholars find our sources.

        Scholarship is an ongoing conversation and supports the development of ideas and knowledge. If other scholars can't find, evaluate, and use our sources, then our scholarship becomes a dead end. Citations provide breadcrumbs others can use to retrace our steps and to support their research.

    - To lend credibility to our work.

        Strong academic arguments are well researched and rely, in part, on evidence from expert sources. Without them, the credibility of our papers are doubtful.

    - To maintain our academic integrity and avoid plagiarism.

        Because we are honorable, we give credit where credit is due.

THE MLA PAPER: SOURCE CITATIONS

MLA Citation Types

In MLA, there are two primary citation types: Works Cited entries and in-text citations.

Works Cited Entries

Works Cited entries are placed at the end of academic papers and provide complete details about sources so that other scholars can find them. Works Cited entries are listed alphabetically. We will look more closely Works Cited entries later in the course.

In-Text Citations

In-Text citations are shorted citations placed within the bodies of papers at the end of sentences where the sources are used. An MLA in-text citation is meant to be simple and brief, providing necessary source information in a non-distracting way.

In-text citations refer back to Works Cited entries. For example, often Works Cited entries begin with an author's last name. As an easy cross-reference, in-text citations often include this information and a page number. In-text citations do not include all of the information found in the Works Cited entry because that would make papers very difficult to read.

THE MLA PAPER: SOURCE CITATIONS

The Most Common In-Text Citation

The format of the most common in-text citation is .

Signal phrase, "Quotation" (Last.Name Page#).
Example: Signal Phrase, "Quotation" (Johnson 27).

We'll talk about signal phrases in a bit, but for now, let's focus on the most basic type of in-text citation shown above. What do you notice about it?

- How is the in-text citation set apart from the quotation? What encloses it.
- What is included in the in-text citation?
- Where is the final punctuation? Is it right after the quotation or after the citation? Why do you think it's located where it is?
- Is there punctuation inside the citation?

Now, take a moment and write down the format that you see, above, and think about the questions I've asked. Get used to looking at and writing down/typing the correct format.

THE MLA PAPER: SOURCE CITATIONS

Review: The Most Common In-Text Citation

Signal phrase, "Quotation" (Johnson 27).

Ok, now, which entry below is correct based on what you've learned, assuming that the author's last name is Johnson and the page number where the source information was found is 27?

1. Signal phrase, "Quotation." (Johnson 27).
2. Signal phrase, "Quotation." (Johnson 27)
3. Signal phrase, "Quotation" (Johnson, 27)
4. Signal phrase, "Quotation." (Johnson, 27).
5. Signal phrase, "Quotation" (Johnson 27).
6. Signal phrase, "Quotation" (johnsen 27).

With the correct format in front of you and a little careful attention, it's pretty easy to determine which entry is correct (even if you have to study them a bit). This is why it's essential that when creating MLA citations, that you have correct sample formatting in front of you. I've created an "MLA In-Text Citation Cheat Sheet" to help you with this. You'll find it in the Canvas module labeled, "Course Materials."

To succeed in this class, you are required to demonstrate you can create accurate in-text citations consistently. No "sloppy authorship" permitted when you have everything you need at your fingertips. (BTW, the correct answer is 5.)

THE MLA PAPER: SOURCE CITATIONS

Other Common In-Text Citations

Here are a few types of in-text citations you're likely to encounter –

- Two authors with page numbers:

  Signal phrase, paraphrase (Johnson and Chin 34).

- Author without page number (say, on a web page without page numbers):

  Signal phrase, paraphrase (Johnson, par. 3).
  [Because a web page doesn't have page numbers, use the paragraph number instead.]
  [Note that this kind of entry includes a comma. Most do NOT include a comma.]

- No author and no page number (say, on a web page):

  Signal phrase, summary ("MLA In-Text Citations," par. 3).
  [Because you don't know the author's name, you use the title of the web page instead.]
  [Because long titles are distracting inside the text, shorten them to no more than three words.]

- Now, go to the "MLA In-Text Citation Cheat Sheet" in "Course Materials" to look at more types.

  Have this handy and on speed dial throughout the semester. Guessing is no, no bueno.

THE MLA PAPER: SOURCE CITATIONS

"SUCCESS ISN'T ALWAYS ABOUT GREATNESS. IT'S ABOUT CONSISTENCY. CONSISTENT HARD WORK LEADS TO SUCCESS. GREATNESS WILL COME."

DWAYNE JOHNSON

Essential Habit for Success
Consistently refer to sample formats when creating citation entries.
Thanks, Rock!

Don't just guess because…

IF YOU'RE JUST GUESSING

I'M GUESSING YOU'RE NOT THINKING.

or maybe just not being "thoughtful" enough.

THE MLA PAPER: SOURCE CITATIONS

Last Comment on In-Text Citations

Beware of FOITC: the Fear of In-Text Citations

MLA can seem very confusing because there are so many different types of in-text citations depending on the circumstance. Don't worry, though, for these reasons:

1. For the most part, you will use maybe four types of in-text citations throughout the course. When you come upon a new type you haven't used before, you can consult the following:

   - MLA In-Text Citation Cheat Sheet: I created this one-pager for you. It's free and easy to use.
   - Purdue's Online Writing Lab (OWL) has great information. Just BE SURE you are in their MLA section, not their APA section.
   - Google is your friend: You don't know the in-text citation format for your source? Just type "MLA in-text citation, two authors" into the search box and lots of sources will appear. Rely on **.edu NOT .com sites** for the entry format you use. Again, be sure the format is **MLA** and not APA.

2. Some rules apply no matter what.

   - The citation will always be enclosed in parentheses. You just have to figure out what goes in between them. It's almost always 1-3 pieces of information and occasionally some punctuation.
   - The period will ALWAYS come after the citation because that's how the sentence is concluded. The in-text citation will never just hang out there in space between sentences.

3. Once you get in the habit of using cheat sheets and other resources consistently, it will become a habit you won't want to dispense with.

   - In doing so, you'll feel more confident, and you'll earn the respect and admiration of your instructors.

SLIDE 18 STRETCH

Let's Review

So far, we've looked at the following -

- Why MLA formatting and citation style is important.
- Acceptable file types for submitting papers.
- How to format MLA papers.
- Two major categories of MLA citation: Works Cited Entries and In-Text Citations.
- How to format in-text citations.
- Resources available to help you and to have at your fingertips.

To help you proceed, you have:

- Created an MLA-formatted paper template.
- Reviewed the "MLA In-Text Citation Cheat Sheet."

If you haven't done these yet, do so once you've finished this PowerPoint. Doing so, will set you up for success and course happiness.

Next, we'll learn how to embed source information in MLA papers…

THE MLA PAPER: EMBEDDING SOURCES

Embedding Quotations, Paraphrases, and Summaries

Properly embedding quotations, paraphrases, and summaries is an ESSENTIAL SKILL for writing strong, effective, successful academic papers.

Again, I want to convince you of this, so let's start by imagining we're at a party. At this party, everyone talks at once. People blurt things out randomly. No one is guiding the conversation. It's unclear how one idea relates to the other. At this party, I'd have one thing on my mind: How soon can I leave?

When you're writing a paper, you are communicating with others. When picking up your paper, your readers – your audience – enter a new and unfamiliar world. You are the host in this new space, and your role is to thoughtfully and respectfully guide your guests through it. Unless you want guests to wonder how soon they can leave, your role is to guide the conversation, introducing your guests to each other, and relating their ideas to each others' and to your own.

This is why we carefully "embed" the words and thoughts of others into our essays, using a few simple rules. No matter how good ideas are, no matter how good source are, papers that don't demonstrate this, don't fulfill an essential function. They don't work.

So let's learn these rules and practice applying them…

19

THE MLA PAPER: EMBEDDING SOURCES

Step One for Embedding Sources: Use a Signal Phrase

First, begin with a Signal Phrase

Every quote, paraphrase, and summary that you include in your essays begins with or includes a signal phrase. This is how you introduce the ideas of others so they're not stuck in the paper like something that a guest has blurted out at a party.

Sample signal phrases:

- According to social psychologist Claude Steele, "Quotation…"
- Steele asserts that…
- Steele concludes that…
- Steele urges us to…

A signal phrase can also be placed in the middle of a quotation, paraphrase, or summary:

- "Stereotypes are harmful," according to Steele, "because they…

THE MLA PAPER: EMBEDDING SOURCES

Step One for Embedding Sources: Use a Signal Phrase (con't)

Signal Phrases should include rhetorically accurate verbs:

When choosing the verb for your signal phrase, think about what the author is actually doing. Are they arguing for something, proposing something, asserting something, have they found something through their research (as in "Steel finds that…")?

Examples of rhetorically accurate verbs (this document is in "Course Materials"):

Report, Persuasive Essay, Literary Essay	Report or Persuasive Essay *that refers to an expert's opinion or research studies*	Report or Persuasive Essay *that describes beginnings, causes, effects, etc.*	Persuasive Essay *that refers to the possibilities of what ideas can create or assist with*	Report or Persuasive Essay *that involves laws or legal proposals*
Alludes to	Analyzes	Advances	Accomplishes	Authorizes
Attests	Assumes	Affects	Achieves	Allows
Clarifies	Concludes	Compels	Aids	Permits
Confirms	Confirms	Discovers	Alleviates	Sanctions
Conveys	Considers	Empowers	Ameliorates	Licenses
Denotes	Construes	Forces	Assembles	Documents
Depicts	Deduces	Generates	Assists	Consents
Determines	Deliberates	Ignites	Attains	Forbids

Don't use:

- Says
  - It's too general – it's a "throwaway" word that doesn't convey meaning. It doesn't help the reader understand what your source is doing with their words.

- Mentions
  - It's too casual. Argumentative statements aren't casual. They are evidence-based and the result of careful judgment. Think of this: In proposing marriage, the person "proclaims" it, they don't "mention" it. The statements of authors are almost as important as marriage proposals. They've required almost as much thought and are serious, not casual statements.

THE MLA PAPER: EMBEDDING SOURCES

Step Two for Embedding Sources:

Add the Quote, Paraphrase, or Summary

Quotation

Quotations are the actual, exact words found in a source text. They are placed in "quotation marks." Quotations are always followed by an in-text citation. Because they stand out strongly in a paper, quotations are only used when the exact words an author uses are important. Use quotations sparingly.

Paraphrase

Paraphrases are a source's ideas put into the writer's own words. They are NOT placed in quotation marks but are ALWAYS followed by an in-text citation. They can be as long or longer than the original source. They are not simple word-for-word replacements.

Summary

Summaries provide the main points a source text uses to support its argument. They are put in the writer's own words. They are NOT placed in quotation marks but are ALWAYS followed by an in-text citation. Summaries are brief.

THE MLA PAPER: EMBEDDING SOURCES

Step Three for Embedding Sources:

Add the In-Text Citation

General Format for Embedding Sources:

> According to the author, "Quotation" (LastName Page).

Tricky Trick (But not too tricky for you!):

When the author's name is used in the signal phrase, it's NOT also used in the in-text citation. Why? Because the signal phrase already makes the source clear:

> Author's name is NOT in signal phrase, then it must be in the citation:
> According to the author, "Quotation" (Steele 134).

> Author's name IS in signal phrase, then not also placed in the citation.
> According to Steele, "Quotation" (134).

THE MLA PAPER: EMBEDDING SOURCES

Step Four for Embedding Sources:

Add Your Analysis or Commentary

This is the "so what?"

- Our analysis or commentary connects the source information we've used to our purpose for using it. "Through his study, Steel demonstrates…"
- We must make this connection clear to the reader.
- This purpose should relate to the main point of the paragraph or overall paper.
- It's the important last step to embedding sources in essays.

Next, we'll look at how to introduce authors in our essays…

THE MLA PAPER: REFERRING TO SOURCES

Introducing Authors

While not all source authors are introduced in your papers, the key sources – those whose work we largely rely on - must be introduced.

Steps for Introducing Authors:

1. The FIRST time an author is introduced, use their FIRST -and- LAST names.

2. After this, only use the author's LAST NAME with no title (NO: Dr. Steele YES: Steele).

3. The first time a key author is introduced also include their PROFESSION.

   - Why? The reader must know what qualifies this author to speak on your topic.
     - QUALIFIED: Physicist Albert Einstein argues that time and space are relative.
     - UNQUALIFIED: Physicist Albert Einstein argues that Big Macs cause Crohn's Disease.
   - If you don't know an author's profession, google their name. If they are important in their field, you'll easily find it.

When to Introduce Authors

1. If authors are key to your overall argument, introduce them at the beginning of your paper to provide context for the sides of the debate.

2. Introduce those authors whose work you largely rely on in your essay as you reference them in your essay..

THE MLA PAPER: REFERRING TO SOURCES

Avoid Awkward Wordiness in Introductions

Unnecessary and awkward wordiness when introducing works and authors is a tell-tale sign of an unseasoned academic writer. This is easy to correct, and one easy way to demonstrate your strength as a writer.

NO:

In "The Colors of Summer" by Cerise Heron who is a photojournalist, she argues that …

YES:

In "The Colors of Summer," photojournalist Cerise Heron argues that…

Technique:

- Place the author's profession in a word or two before their name.
- Eliminate the phrase, "In X by Y…" A common rephrasing is shown above.
- Eliminate instances of writing the author's name followed by "she" or "he" later in the sentence.

SLIDE 25 STRETCH

Let's Review

Since our last review, we've learned how to embed sources in our essays and introduce authors. Specifically, we've learned –

- The definitions of quotations, paraphrases, and summaries.
- The four required components of a properly embedded source –
  - The signal phrase
  - The quotation, paraphrase, or summary
  - The in-text citation
  - The analysis or commentary
- When, why, and how to introduce authors.

Again, embedding sources and introducing authors are ESSENTIAL SKILLS for this course.

Next, we'll look at two mechanical techniques necessary for academic papers: correctly capitalizing the titles of works and punctuating quotations …

27

THE MLA PAPER: TITLE MECHANICS

Capitalizing the Titles of Works

All Main Words in the Title of Works are Capitalized.

No matter how original sources capitalize their own works, all main words must be capitalized in MLA papers, in all instances. No matter how you see them online, all main words must be capitalized in MLA papers, in all instances.

Punctuating the Titles of Works

Say you are interested in dating, in this case, a woman. Does the fact that they are Mrs. Lopez or Miss Lopez matter to you? I hope so! It's likewise important for scholars (your readers) to know if the works you refer to are short works or long works. This is how they know:

The titles of long works are *italicized*.

This includes the titles of books, whole websites (like *WordPress* or *YouTube*), long films, and newspaper or journal titles.

The titles of short works are place in "quotation" marks.

This includes the chapters in books, web pages (like the title of a blog entry, or the title of just one page in a whole website), short films (like *YouTube* videos), and newspaper or journal article titles (the titles of "articles," not the title of the whole *Journal* or *Newspaper*).

THE MLA PAPER: QUOTATION MECHANICS

Punctuating Quotes, Part I

Commas, Periods, and Special Punctuation and Quotation Marks

Periods and commas go INSIDE of "quotation marks," as the comma is shown in this sentence. This is weird and students struggle with it. But it's simple.

NO: In "The Colors of Summer", Lopez states that…

YES: In "The Colors of Summer," Lopez states that…

Often you will place a citation at the end of a sentence. In this case, the period goes outside of the closed parenthesis, not before the quotation marks, as you've seen.

NO: … as Lopez states in the "The Colors of Summer." (134)

YES: … as Lopez states in the "The Colors of Summer" (134).

Sometimes quotations end with special punctuation like an exclamation point or question mark. Because the meaning of the quotation would be lost without that punctuation, the special punctuation remains inside the quotation marks AND a period is placed after the citation.

NO: … and should we do something about this" (134)?

YES: … and should we do something about this?" (134).

THE MLA PAPER: QUOTATION MECHANICS

Punctuating Quotes, Part II

Quotes Inside of Quotes

Quotations inside of other quotations are placed in *single* quotation marks. Note: There is also a special in-text citation style for this circumstance, as shown below.

NO: As the author explains, "The colors of summer are bright and bring about "an active feeling of euphoria" in woodland creatures" (Newman qtd. in Case 73).

YES: As the author explains, "The colors of summer are bright and bring about 'an active feeling of euphoria' in woodland creatures" (Newman qtd. in Case 73). (Newman's quote is placed in single quotation marks.)

Titles of Short Works When Found Inside of Quotations

Because we also place quotation marks around the titles of short works, we need to make the quotation marks SINGLE not DOUBLE when they are located inside a quotation.

NO: As Salas finds, "The sun feels like love, as the song "Walking on Sunshine" attests to" (Salas 1).

YES: As Salas finds, "The sun feels like love, as the song 'Walking on Sunshine' attests to" (1). In this case the author's name is used in the signal phrase, so it's not repeated in the citation. AND because she's referring to a song title, not to the quote of another author, the "qtd. in" found in the examples above aren't necessary.

THE MLA PAPER: QUOTATION MECHANICS

Punctuating Quotes, Part III

Ellipses (the dot, dot, dot)

When removing words from the MIDDLE of a source quotation, use … to show that you've removed unnecessary words.

Ellipses Rules:

- The words you remove must not change the meaning of the author's quote.
  - ORIGINAL QUOTE: "We can not do something about this problem."
  - NO: "We can … do something about this problem."
- Do NOT use ellipses when removing words from the beginning or ends of quotations.
  - NO: "… We can not do something about this problem."
  - NO: "We can not do something about this problem …"
- It's not necessary and often not desirable to the complete sentences from source texts. It can be much better to simply draw attention to a few words and embed them into your own sentence:
  - YES: As Smith sees it, the problem is "clear and pressing" (154). Note that no ellipses are used at the beginning or end of this quotation.

THE MLA PAPER: QUOTATION MECHANICS

Punctuating Quotes, Part IV

Grammatical and Mechanical Flow of Quotations and the [Square Bracket]

Quotations must work grammatically and mechanically* with your own text. When they don't, your essay becomes awkward to read. However, you can easily make necessary corrections by placing these changes in [square brackets].

ORIGINAL TEXT: "We've learned that <u>dividing up the health care pie is a key question of our time</u>"

Say, you just want to use the underlined segment but also need to write a complete sentence that starts with a capital letter.

NO: "dividing up the health care pie," Almasi asserts, "is a key question of our time" (134).

NO: "…dividing up the health care pie," Almasi asserts, "is a key question of our time" (134).

YES: "[D]ividing up the health care pie," Almasi asserts, "is a key question of our time" (134).

Again, the changes made in brackets can not change the meaning of the original author's quote.

* Mechanics refer to things like punctuation and capitalization.

Next, we'll look at additional conventions scholars use when writing academic papers…

THE MLA PAPER: ACADEMIC CONVENTIONS

Conventions of Academic Papers

Conventions are common rules people adhere to in a given context. When conventions are broken, it's jarring to the reader and leads to confusion. Things don't "sound right," don't "look right," and distract the reader from the important ideas of the essay. What follows are important conventions to use when writing academic essays.

Use the Present Tense

- When we write about <u>texts</u> and <u>ideas</u>, we use the present tense.
- We only use the past tense when we're referring to something that actually, physically happened in the past.

  NO: As Steele argue**d**,

  YES: As Steele argue**s**,

  YES: As Steele argue**s**, laboratory subjects <u>were</u>* negatively affected by stereotypes.

  *   What the author **argues** relates to ideas and is placed in the **present tense**. What **actually happened** in the past is correctly referred to in the **past tense**.

THE MLA PAPER: ACADEMIC CONVENTIONS

Convention: Tone and Word Choice

The tone of strong academic writing isn't overly stuffy but it isn't informal, either. Appropriately formal academic writing demonstrates that you understand your context and your audience.

- **Your context is scholarly.**

  This means that it reflects careful thought and accurate word choice. Big words do not improve papers. They can often get in the way of meaning. Precise words improve papers. They drive meaning forward. They promote clarity. They get the reader saying, "Yes!" and "Interesting!" and "I disagree, but I see their point!" Jack Kerouac is known for having said, "One day I will find the write words, and they will be simple." Yes, indeed.

- **Your audience is a general readership that hasn't read your sources and may not know anything about your subject.**

  Don't assume that your audience is your instructor or a member of the class. When explaining something, write for a fifteen-year-old. Make it that clear. In tone, write for someone you don't know. Write respectfully. Your audience is not composed of your besties. When you write in an overly informal manner, you're not showing appropriate respect for those you've invited into your essay.

- **Although your tone is appropriately formal, you can still use your own "voice."**

  You don't need to write like a robot. Your audience wants to experience your uniqueness.

THE MLA PAPER: ACADEMIC CONVENTIONS

Addressing Readers: One "Don't"

Do NOT use the pronoun "you."

This is important. Do not use "you" in your essays, period. Before submitting an essay, search for the term "you" using the Find tool to ensure you've eliminated all instances of "you," "your," and "you're." Here's why –

- You can't presume to speak for your reader. This is overly familiar and disrespectful.
  - When you and I are speaking to each other, we are individuals speaking to each other, as individuals. We have a bond of familiarity with each other. But your reader doesn't know you, and you don't know them. Addressing your reader as "you" in an essay is like walking right into their home without being invited.

- It is jarring for the reader to be "called out" by being referred to directly.
  - When you're watching a movie, you are immersed in it. Imagine if an actor, in the middle of slaying a dragon, turned to you and said, "Hey, you! Check out what I'm doing!" All the magic of the moment would be lost. You'd become self-conscious. A moment before, you, too, were slaying that dragon. All of a sudden, you're aware that you're just sitting in a theater with popcorn on your shirt. It kills the mood. Allow your reader their distance by not using "you."

With that "don't" covered, let's look at some "dos"…

THE MLA PAPER: ACADEMIC CONVENTIONS

Addressing Readers: The Dos

DO use third-person pronouns and nouns.

When intending to refer to your audience it works perfectly well to use third-person terms like they, them, their, authors, readers, opponents, advocates. Using the third person maintains necessary distance while still allowing readers to think of themselves and others as part of the group referred to.

Readers of this slide may agree with me.

In a case like this, readers picture themselves as a part of the group called "readers." Readers don't need to be grabbed by the collar with a "you" to imagine themselves as a part of the conversation.

DO use "we" and related words like "us" and "our" if you'd like.

It is perfectly okay to use the terms "we" and "our" in your essays. These project a spirit of inclusiveness. You're drawing your reader into the space of thought that you occupy.

When you do use we, our, or us, however, be sure that the statement is either generally true for reasonable, informed people ("We worry about health care costs…") or that you "qualify" it by saying "We may find..." or "We often find…" or "Many of us are concerned about…" Note that writing tutors and other professors may discourage using "we" and it would be unusal to use "we" in very serious research papers, it is acceptable in our context.

36

THE MLA PAPER: ACADEMIC CONVENTIONS

Referring to Yourself or Your Ideas

Do Use "I" (First-Person Singular Pronoun)

You may have been taught not to refer to yourself as "I" in your essays. Some teachers may not want you to use it, but in this class, it is acceptable and even desired.

When making arguments, it is accurate and appropriate to claim your own judgments and positions by stating "I argue," "I find," "I propose."

Also, Let Your Writing Speak for You

Anything that isn't cited in your work is understood to reflect your ideas and your judgments. They speak for you without always needing to use "I."

THE MLA PAPER: ACADEMIC CONVENTIONS

Convention: Authorial Command

Successful arguments persuade people that the position stated in the essay is correct or, at least, reasonable. To be persuaded, we must trust the writer, clearly understand what they are arguing, and find that they are committed to the position they've taken.

Demonstrate Commitment

- **NO:** "There are many ways to look at a problem and it's hard to choose."

   Statements like these aren't helpful because it is ALWAYS the case that there are many ways to look at a problem and it is USUALLY hard to choose. That's why the author's writing and thinking matter to readers. Writers must find ways to look at problems and make choices (draw conclusions), as the author does, below.

- **YES:** "Although the addictive and cost-friendly qualities of fast food are well-researched , I argue that solutions to the fast-food crisis can not be fully addressed without considering the role of restaurant locations and the political forces at work that encourage obesity. A meaningful solution will require that we rethink city planning."

   This writer looked past the addictive qualities of fast food and its affordability to make a less obvious argument, and they focused specifically on another aspect worth considering. The writer did the hard work of looking at the issue from a single, focused perspective and found something meaningful for us to think about. There are many ways to look at a problem and it's hard to choose, but we must do both.

Be Consistent

- Many times a writer will defend an argument until the last page and then begin arguing something else. It's okay to modify your position, but then rewrite your claim and the earlier portion of the essay, so that every paper is arguing something consistently until the end.

THE MLA PAPER: ACADEMIC CONVENTIONS

Authorial Command:
Characterizing Your Ideas

When characterizing your conclusions, judgments, and findings…

Use verbs that reflect the hard work you've done: "I conclude," "I find," "I propose," "I urge." Or, use characterizations like, "In my judgment."

Do NOT use the words "believe" or "opinion."

We <u>cannot</u> argue about beliefs or opinions, so they should not be included in our arguments. These are important, but they belong in other discussions. Stating our beliefs and opinions is like bringing a ball to a game that no one else can play with. If a friend believes or holds a certain opinion, who are we to argue with them? Conclusions, however, are based on facts and reasoning. We can argue about these.

Many times, students use these terms because they're not confident in what they're saying. Do the necessary work to become confident in your statements, make sure they hold up well, and then use a term that reflects this hard and important work, like those listed above ("I conclude," etc.).

SLIDE 40 STRETCH

Let's Review

First, since this may be the longest PowerPoint you've ever seen, I'd like to comfort you in knowing that this replaces a thick, expensive textbook. It presents many of the most essential things you need to know in concise form. The first chapter of many college textbooks can be 20 or 30 pages of dense text. I know it's long, but hang in there and challenge yourself to master these mini-lessons. We just have a few more slides to go.

Since our last review, we've learned some important rules for writing successful academic papers, including –

- How to format titles.
- How to punctuate quotations in in the most common circumstances you'll encounter.
- What we mean by academic writing "conventions."
- Tone and word choice.
- Addressing readers and referring to yourself and your own ideas.
- How to command an audience with authority.

Congratulations for making it this far. These are ESSENTIAL SKILLS for this course.

Next, we'll look at the key elements of academic arguments…

THE MLA PAPER: ARGUMENT ELEMENTS

Essay Elements:

The Main Claim and Subclaims

Main claim

- The main claim is the primary assertion – the main point – of your argument. This is the conclusion you've drawn based on your research, evidence, and reasoning. The main claim is what the whole essay works to support.

Subclaims

- Subclaims support the main claim. The body of the paper is devoted to logically asserting these sub-points in support of the main claim. Each is backed by sound evidence and reasoning.

- Typically, each paragraph will assert a subclaim which the paragraph will then support.

THE MLA PAPER: ARGUMENT ELEMENTS

Essay Elements:

The Beginning, Middle, and End

The Beginning: Introduction

- The introduction includes necessary context, including necessary information about the discussion at hand, the oppositional positions in the debate, and your main claim.

- Key terms, even those that you think are commonly understood must be defined so that your reader knows what you mean by them.

The Middle: Body

- The body of the essay is devoted to supporting each point (each subclaim) needed to support the overall claim of the essay (the main claim). Subclaims are supported with sound evidence and reasoning. Importantly, each paragraph in the body must refer back to the main claim so that it's clear to the reader how that paragraph supports it.

The End: Conclusion

- The conclusion of a short paper should not be a recap of what's been said. Instead, the conclusion should include a new insight, suggest next steps, or show how what we've learned can help us or apply to other situations, for example.

THE MLA PAPER: ARGUMENT ELEMENTS

Essay Elements:

Counterarguments & Rebuttals

All arguments must include one or more counterargument and rebuttal.

- A counterargument is an assertion that contradicts your position. A rebuttal is your response to it.

- Arguments must take opposing positions into account and must respond to them.

- Counterarguments should be strong, not weak because weak counterarguments call writers' credibility into question. They suggest that the writer's argument can't hold up to strong opposition or that no strong opposition exists.

- If NO strong, actual opposition from credible sources exists, there is no reason to make an argument. Experts already agree, so there's no reason to argue about it..

- Introducing counterarguments does not derail an essay IF the writer rebuts each counterargument in a way that supports their own main claim.

- It is okay to assert that elements of a counterargument should be taken into account. This is called a "concession."

- If you become convinced that the counterargument is stronger than your own, modify your claim to make the "counter" case. This is a part of the thinking and writing process.

Next, we'll consider what ties each element and each sentence together – logic …

THE MLA PAPER: LOGIC

Making Logical Connections

The Logical Progression of an Essay

- We build our arguments brick by brick, sentence by sentence. Each sentence must progress to the next, like a baton that is handed off between runners in a relay race. If a logical step is missing, the baton falls and the race is lost. Do not underestimate how carefully you need to link all the ideas in your essays. It means being very deliberate. Students may think they're over-explaining, but that's what your reader needs. Walk them through your argument very carefully and intentionally, one step at a time.

- Just as each sentence needs to logically relate to each other, the introduction, body, and conclusion must logically relate to each other, and each body paragraph (each subclaim) must logically relate to the main claim and to the subclaim that came before it.

Logically relating ideas to each other is an ESSENTIAL SKILL in academic writing.

- Think carefully about how ideas relate to each other and make these relationships clear to your reader.

- One way to do this is by using well-chosen transitional words (like "however," "instead," "but"). Examples are included in the document titled "Transition Words and Phrases" in the "Course Materials" module.

- Sometimes students use transitional words incorrectly, and they confuse the reader. If you're not quite sure how to use a transitional word, look it up in a dictionary, look for *YouTube* videos that can help, or visit the Writing Center.

THE MLA PAPER: LOGIC

For logic's sake, don't use "etc."

Instead, make statements logically complete.

- "Etc." doesn't complete the logical circle of the statement because it leaves the reader guessing what else the writer would include in the category they're describing.

- For the reader, this guessing is distracting, etc. (← See what I did there? I took a perfectly good sentence, and weakened it with "etc.")

- "Etc." also has informal feel to it, as if the writer is saying, "Ya' know what I mean." This is how we talk to our friends but not how we speak to respected members of our audience.

Instead, use "for example," or "including."

- Using "for example" or "including" gives a statement a greater feeling of completeness and appears to assist the reader rather than presuming they know everything the writer might include in a category.

Next, let's look at some common grammar issues students often have…

45

THE MLA PAPER: GRAMMAR

Common Grammar Issues:
Unnecessary Pronoun Shifts

Students often shift wildly from we, you, it, and they when talking about the same thing or when it's unnecessary, creating confusion. For example –

NO: It is important for <u>people</u> to be sure before <u>you</u> get married.
YES: It is important <u>for people</u> to be sure before <u>they</u> get married.

NO: <u>We</u> are happy with our lives in the town. <u>You</u> can get anything you need there.
YES: <u>We</u> are happy with our lives in the town. <u>We</u> can get anything we need there.

For more information, go to "Course Materials" where you'll find a handout on 1st, 2nd, 3rd Person Shifts. You'll also find more information online.

Note that it is now considered acceptable to use "they," "their," and "them" as a gender neutral way to refer to singular nouns.

- For example: An art student might like to take pictures of their work in our gallery.
- Less awkward: Art students might like to take pictures of their work in our gallery.

THE MLA PAPER: GRAMMAR

Common Grammar Issues:
Unnecessary Shifts in Verb Tense

Review your sentences to ensure they're not unnecessary shifting in verb tenses that can confuse and distract readers; then correct any errors.

NO: When club <u>limited</u> its membership, it <u>raises</u> its dues.
YES: When the club <u>limited</u> its membership, it <u>raised</u> its dues.

NO: As Barbara <u>put</u> in her contact lenses, the telephone <u>rings</u>.
YES: As Barbara <u>put</u> in her contact lenses, the telephone <u>rang</u>.

NO: When he kicked the ball into the net, the fans go wild.
YES: When he <u>kicked</u> the ball into the net, the fans <u>went</u> wild.

For more information, go to "Course Materials" where you'll find a handout on Verb Shifts. You can also find more information online.

THE MLA PAPER: GRAMMAR

Common Grammar Issues:
Noun/Verb Agreement Errors

We can easily lose sight of the nouns in our sentences and their related verbs. This often results in nouns and verbs that don't agree in "number," so that one will be singular and the other will be plural. Like other grammar errors, this is confusing and distracting to the reader. Be sure to go through your essays to correct any agreement errors before submitting.

NO: There <u>is</u> many <u>reasons</u> to disagree about gun control.

YES: There <u>are</u> many <u>reasons</u> to disagree about gun control.

NO: The <u>number</u> of students in each class <u>vary</u>.

YES: The <u>number</u> of students in each class <u>varies</u>.

For more information, go to "Course Materials" where you'll find a handout on noun/verb agreement. You can also find more information online.

THE MLA PAPER: GRAMMAR

Common Grammar Issues:
Noun/Pronoun Agreement Errors

Often in our writing, we refer to a thing (for example, a group of people, a theory, a cake) and then refer back to that thing using pronoun (I made a <u>cake</u> and liked <u>it</u>!). We do this because it sounds weird to say, "I made a cake and liked the cake." BUT, when we do this, we have to make sure that the word that's doing the referring (in this case, "it") agrees with the original word it refers to ("cake"). The sentence, "I made a <u>cake</u> and liked <u>them</u>!," doesn't agree in number (singular or plural), as is probably clear.

This is a common error in student writing. Go through and look for any words that refer to something else: it, them, they, his, her, these, those. Make sure these words agree "in number" with what they refer to. For more information, go to "Course Materials" or search for materials online.

NO: When <u>cars</u> break down, <u>it</u> needs to be fixed right away.
YES: When <u>cars</u> break down, <u>they</u> need to be fixed right away.
NO: <u>Animals</u> don't read books, so <u>it</u> doesn't know any better.
YES: <u>Animals</u> don't read books, so <u>they</u> don't know any better.

SLIDE 50 STRETCH

Let's Review

Since our last review, we've considered –

- The elements of argumentative essays –
  - The main claim and subclaims
  - The introduction, body, and conclusion of an essay
  - Counterarguments and rebuttals

- Some considerations related to logic

- Some common grammar issues students have –
  - Unnecessary pronoun shifts
  - Unnecessary shifts in verb tense
  - Singular/Plural agreement errors

Last, we'll look at the checklist you'll complete for each essay.

THE CHECKLIST

Each essay submission will include

a completed checklist.

Review your essay before you submit it and place an "X" in the first column after you've ensured that each item has been addressed.

Paper Layout

For more information, you'll find the Sample MLA paper *in Course Materials in Blackboard. Tip: Create a template now that you'll open up, rename, and use throughout the semester.*

	My paper has 1" margins.
	My paper is double-spaced throughout. (There are no extra line spaces between paragraphs.)
	My paper includes a correct MLA heading.
	My paper is written in Times New Roman 12-point font.
	Each page includes my last name a space and the page number in the header at the upper right hand corner of each page.

- Word, PDF, and text-only versions of the checklist are located in "Course Materials."
- By reviewing and checking off each item, you can help ensure your success in this class. Use it as an important resource.

THE END

You made it!

Review this PowerPoint carefully and often.